



**Department of
Veterans Affairs**

April 2005

Office of Public Affairs
Media Relations

Washington, DC 20420
(202) 273-6000
www.va.gov

Fact Sheet

VA's Headstones and Markers

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) furnishes upon request, at no charge to the applicant, a headstone or marker for the grave of an eligible veteran in any cemetery around the world. For deaths that occurred before Sept. 11, 2001, VA may furnish a headstone or marker only for graves that are not marked with a private headstone.

Headstones and markers are provided for eligible spouses and dependents of veterans only in national, military post or state veterans cemeteries. Spouses and dependents buried in private cemeteries are not eligible for a government headstone or marker.

Flat bronze, granite or marble markers and upright granite and marble headstones are available. The style chosen must be consistent with the cemetery's rules. VA national cemeteries order the style used in their cemeteries. Most VA national cemeteries use upright granite or marble headstones, which measure 42 inches in height and 13 inches in width. Niche markers are also available to mark columbaria used for inurnment of cremated remains.

Eligibility

Any deceased veteran discharged from the U.S. armed forces under conditions other than dishonorable is eligible to receive a government headstone or marker. For enlisted persons whose service began after Sept. 7, 1980, and for officers whose service began after Oct. 17, 1981, service must have been for at least 24 months, or the period for which the person was called to active duty.

Members of the reserves and National Guard who die on active duty or while performing training duty may receive a headstone or marker. Reservists and National Guardsmen with 20 years service who are entitled to retired pay are also eligible. A copy of the Reserve Retirement Eligibility Benefits Letter must accompany the application. People who had only active duty for training while in the National Guard or reserves are not eligible unless there are special circumstances, such as death while on duty or as a result of training.

If the death occurred before Sept. 11, 2001, by law VA may only furnish a headstone or marker if the grave is unmarked.

How to Order a Government Headstone or Marker

When burial or memorialization is in a national, military post, or state veterans cemetery, cemetery staff will order a headstone or marker, using inscription information provided by the next of kin.

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When burial is in a private cemetery, VA Form 40-1330, *Application for Standard Government Headstone or Marker*, must be submitted, along with a copy of the veteran's military discharge documents. Do not send original documents because they will not be returned. Usually, funeral directors will obtain headstones or markers as part of their services. Applications and additional information may be obtained at any VA national cemetery or regional office or by calling 1-800-827-1000. This form, VA Form 40-1330, is also available on VA's web site at www.va.gov/hmorder.htm; however, it cannot be submitted electronically. Completed applications may be faxed toll-free to 1-800-455-7143 or mailed to:

Memorial Programs Service (41A1)
Department of Veterans Affairs
5109 Russell Road
Quantico, VA 22134-3903

Inscriptions

Government-furnished headstones and markers must be inscribed with the legal name of the deceased, branch of service, and years of birth and death, in this order. Memorial markers must also include "*In Memory Of*" at the top. If space is available, the inscription may also contain any or all of the following: veteran's rank, war service, military decorations, awards and month and day of birth and death. All of these items must be inscribed in English.

Headstones and markers also may be inscribed with an approved "emblem of belief" such as a cross or Star of David. A listing of the emblems that may be inscribed is on the back of the application form and also appears on the VA Web site at www.cem.va.gov.

Additional personalized inscriptions such as terms of endearment ("beloved brother and son"; "loving wife and mother", etc.) and nicknames ("Poppy", "Funny Face", etc.) that meet acceptable standards of good taste may also be added. Affiliation with military components or organizations (Women's Army Corps, WAC, WAVES, etc.) or veterans groups or other inscriptions may be added at the bottom of the headstone or marker with VA's approval, if space is available and the requested inscription is respectful and in good taste.

Civilian titles such as Doctor or Reverend, or any other additions to the legal name, are not permitted on the mandatory name line of the headstone or marker, but may be added as part of the additional inscription at the bottom of the marker.

Non-English optional inscription items must be in Latin-alphabet characters and numerals. Accent marks and standard marks of punctuation may be used. Requests for an additional inscription in a language other than English must include the English translation of the inscription.

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No graphics (logos, symbols, etc.) are permitted on government headstones and markers other than approved emblems of belief, the Civil War Union Shield, the Civil War Confederate Southern Cross of Honor and the Medal of Honor insignia.

Documentation must be provided with *VA Form 40-1330* when requesting military awards in the inscription. In most cases this information is provided on the veteran's military discharge documents. Military awards and decorations besides those listed in Block 8 of the application (including those from foreign governments) may be added if space is available. They should be requested in Block 27. Awards and decorations will not be inscribed without documentation to support the request.

A veteran's spouse or other non-veteran dependent buried in a private cemetery is not eligible for a government headstone or marker. However, the applicant may reserve inscription space below the veteran's inscription so that the non-veteran dependent's commemorative data can be inscribed locally, at private expense, when the non-veteran dependent is buried. Alternatively, the non-veteran dependent's name and date of birth can be added at government expense if requested on the application for the veteran's headstone or marker. When the non-veteran dependent is buried, the date of death may then be added at private expense.

Inscriptions for a veteran's spouse or dependent are provided at no expense when they are buried in a national, military post or state veterans cemetery.

Checking Your Headstone or Marker Order Status

It generally takes 30 to 60 days to process an application and have the headstone or marker produced and delivered. To check on the status, VA provides assistance toll-free at 1-800-697-6947 between 8:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. Monday through Friday ET. Applicants may also e-mail about the status of an order to mps.headstones@va.gov. When inquiring by e-mail, be sure to include the veteran's full name, social security number (and/or service number), date of death and information about the veteran's service that may be helpful in researching our records. Please allow at least three business days for a response. Our telephone and e-mail customer service representatives do not have access to information about other VA benefits. To inquire about other VA benefits, call 1-800-827-1000.

Shipping Government Headstones and Markers

Government-furnished headstones and markers are shipped free of charge.

Setting Government Headstones and Markers

Cemetery staff in national or military cemeteries will set the headstone or marker at no cost to the applicant. However, some state veterans' cemeteries and most private cemeteries charge a fee for setting a government headstone or marker. This is a non-reimbursable expense.

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Replacement of Headstones and Markers

Previously furnished headstones and markers may be replaced at government expense when badly deteriorated, illegible, vandalized or stolen. The government will also replace a headstone or marker if it is damaged, the inscription is incorrect, it is different from that specified by the applicant or permitted by the cemetery, or the material or workmanship are of poor quality.

If cemetery personnel damage a government headstone or marker located in a private cemetery, it should be replaced at the expense of the cemetery.

Marble or granite headstones or markers, permanently removed from a grave, must be destroyed until illegible and bronze markers must be returned to the manufacturer for recycling. (Please contact Memorial Programs Service at 1-800-697-6947 or by e-mail at mps.headstones@va.gov for guidance on returning bronze markers.)

Memorial Headstones and Markers

Memorial headstones and markers are provided for deceased active-duty service members and veterans whose remains are not recovered or identified, are buried at sea, donated to science or scattered after cremation. These headstones and markers – which can be for an individual or a group – bear an “*In Memory of*” inscription as their first line and must be placed in a recognized cemetery.

Memorial headstones and markers may also be furnished in national, military or state veterans cemeteries for eligible spouses or other dependents whose remains are unavailable for burial, whether or not they predecease the eligible veteran. They are not available for placement in private cemeteries.

Civil War-Era Headstones and Markers

There are specific styles of upright headstones and flat markers to mark the graves of Union and Confederate Civil War and Spanish-American War dead.

Proof of military service before World War I requires documentation, such as muster rolls, extracts from state files, pension documents or land warrants, to apply for a government headstone or marker.

Memorial markers usually are not provided to memorialize Civil War soldiers whose graves are not identified. The mere fact that the whereabouts of a grave is not known is not sufficient reason to furnish a government headstone or marker. If, however, documentation shows a soldier was buried in a mass grave, even if the actual location of the grave is unknown, VA will provide a memorial marker for placement in a national, state veterans or private cemetery.